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News Release

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Washington, D.C. -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is announcing the integration of management and operations of two VA medical facilities in Montana -- the Fort Harrison VA Medical and Regional Office Center in Helena and VA's Eastern Montana Health Care System based in Miles City.

Together, the two Montana operations will provide a VA presence in every major city in the state. "By combining the resources of these two centers, we will be in a better position to improve quality and access, as well as to increase efficiency for VA health-care users," said Kenneth W. Kizer, M.D., M.P.H., VA Under Secretary for Health.

These two Montana facilities have increasingly worked together in recent years. For example, in 1993, Miles City stopped providing surgical services and started referring these patients to Fort Harrison. In 1996, the two facilities entered into a consortium called "VA Healthcare Montana," after which veterans treated at either of the two facilities were considered common patients of both. Following the closure of all acute care inpatient beds at Miles City in June 1997, the relationship has become even closer. This latest step merges management and policies of the facilities.

The Fort Harrison-Miles City merger follows the successful experience of 42 other VA medical facilities that have integrated at 20 locations throughout the United States within the last two years. VA's increased emphasis on providing integrated ambulatory and primary care services has resulted in greater access, better quality of care, improved customer satisfaction and reduced administrative costs. All savings derived from eliminating duplication are being used to improve direct care for patients.